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THE TALE OF BUNNY COTTON-TAIL

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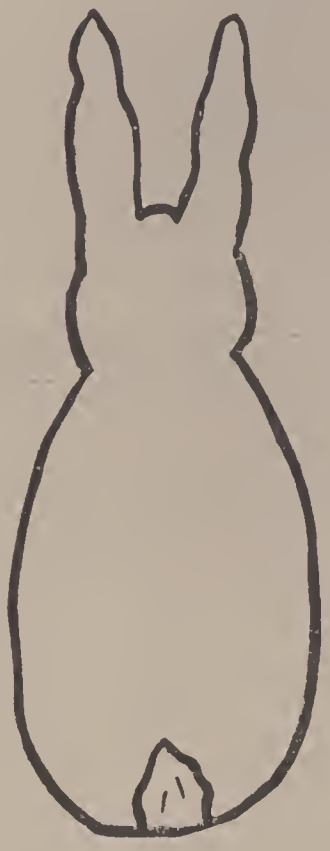
When little Bunny was quite small,
He read by candle-light;
But now that he has grown up tall,
He goes to bed at night!

THE TALE
of
Bunny Cotton-Tail

By LAURA ROUNTREE SMITH



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THE TALE OF
BUNNY COTTON-TAIL

CHAPTER I

If little Bunny Cotton-Tail had not read by candle-light, this story might never have been written.

One evening Bunny Cotton-Tail read very late, and he was so excited over the story he was reading that he waved one paw too near the candle, and burned it sadly. Poor Bunny cried so loud that all the neighbors heard him, and came running in to see what was the matter. Have you ever

cried so loud that you could be heard next door?

Mother Cotton-Tail tied up the burned paw in a cabbage leaf and sent Bunny to bed. And what do you suppose that comical Bunny did? He liked the smell of the cabbage so well, that he ate the leaf all up, and his poor paw began to hurt worse than ever.

This time he did not cry, for he was afraid he would be scolded for eating the cabbage leaf. He crept out of bed and ran out of the house.

Mother Cotton-Tail never allowed little Bunny to go out late at night, so now everything seemed very strange to him. He looked at the

big moon, and he was afraid. He ran on for some time and he came to a beautiful garden.

Here he saw more cabbages than he had ever dreamed of! There were big cabbages, little cabbages, and middle-sized cabbages. He was just going to have a nice meal when he looked up and saw a very tall creature waving its arms at him.

Poor little Bunny was sadly frightened. He did not know that this big thing was only a scare-crow. He had never seen a scare-crow before, in all his life. But he had seen men, and his mother had told him that men did not like rabbits. Bunny thought the

scare-crow was a man, and he quickly crept close to a big cabbage, to hide, and lay quite still for a while.

Every now and then Bunny peeped out from among the cabbage leaves, and there that awful creature and the moon were, always staring at him!

By and by, he decided to run home, and he started off as fast as his little legs would carry him. But the moonlight made him dizzy, and he took the wrong road.

When daylight came, poor little Bunny Cotton-Tail was far from home, and soon a hunter came that way, and caught him. The hunter put Bunny in his bag and took him

home for his little boy to play with. The little boy's name was Harold. When his papa came in with Bunny, Harold clapped his hands for joy. Then the whole family gathered around and made remarks about poor Bunny.

"Why are his ears so long?" Harold asked.

"To keep the flies off," answered Uncle Jack.

"He must have left his tail at home," said big brother.

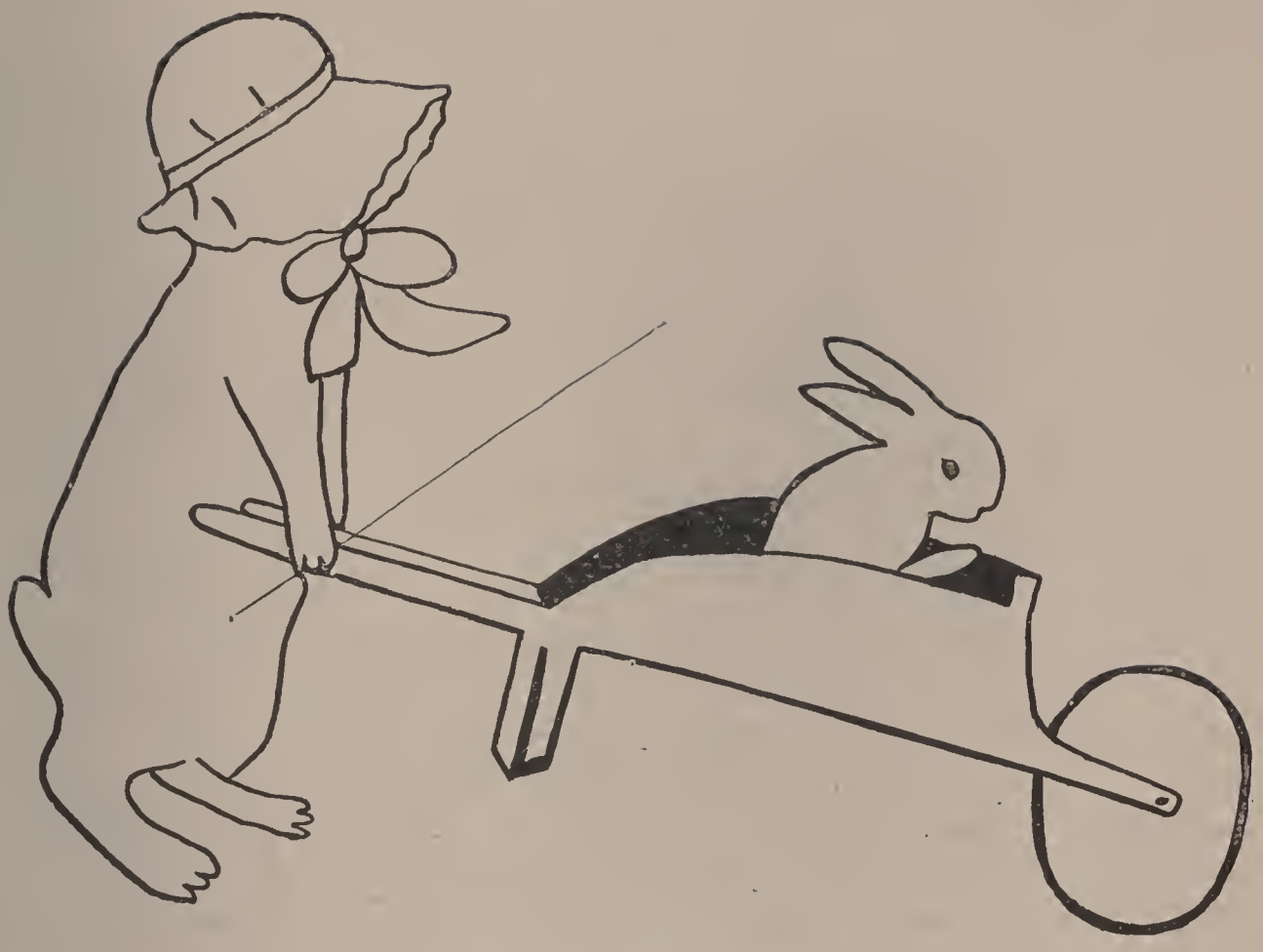
"He looks scared. We must build him a house," said papa.

So they all went to work and made a nice house for Bunny, and big brother brought him a large leaf of cabbage to eat.

Two big tears rolled down poor Bunny's face, for the cabbage made him think of his fright in the garden, and his sore paw, and how he had left home.

Then Harold took Bunny in his arms and hugged him, and that made the poor little rabbit feel better, and he fell asleep.

When Harold put Bunny back in his box, he forgot to shut the door. He never thought that in the morning his new pet might be gone.



When Bunny runs away to roam,
Some one is sure to bring him home.
So Bunny should be good, I say,
And not go out and run away.

CHAPTER II

Late that night Bunny Cotton-Tail made up his mind to run away. So he crept out of his little house, and through a hole in the back fence, and was off. The great moon was staring down at him, and he was very much afraid of the moon, but he could not go very fast, for his paw still hurt him and he limped sadly.

After a while he sat down on a log to rest, and whom did he see coming down the road with a wheelbarrow but Mother Cotton-Tail? She had been searching all night and all day for Bunny.

When Bunny saw his mother he clapped his paws together so hard that he hurt his sore one, and he cried: "Oh, ma, oh, ma!"

Mother Cotton-Tail did not waste any words, for Mr. Fox is out in the woods at night. She just tumbled Bunny into that old wheelbarrow, and whisk! they went down the road; while the big moon laughed and made a face at them.

When they got home all the rabbits in the neighborhood stood around the front gate, and they all cried: "Hurrah! welcome home, Bunny!"

Bunny was so ashamed that he hung his head and waved his sore paw feebly. Then his mother took

him into the house and put him to bed.

Poor Bunny was so shaken up by the ride in that wheel-barrow that he did not sleep very well, and next day he had to stay at home with his mother while all the other rabbits went to a pic-nic.

After supper, when he was sitting up in a big arm-chair by the window, whom should he see coming slowly up the road but his dear friend Susan Cotton-Tail? Susan Cotton-Tail walked slowly because she was very tired. The rabbits had tramped miles and miles on that pic-nic.

Susan Cotton-Tail carried something on her arm. At first Bunny thought it

was a bag, and then he saw it was a basket. What do you suppose Susan Cotton-Tail had in that basket? She had some nice things that she had saved for Bunny, from the picnic.

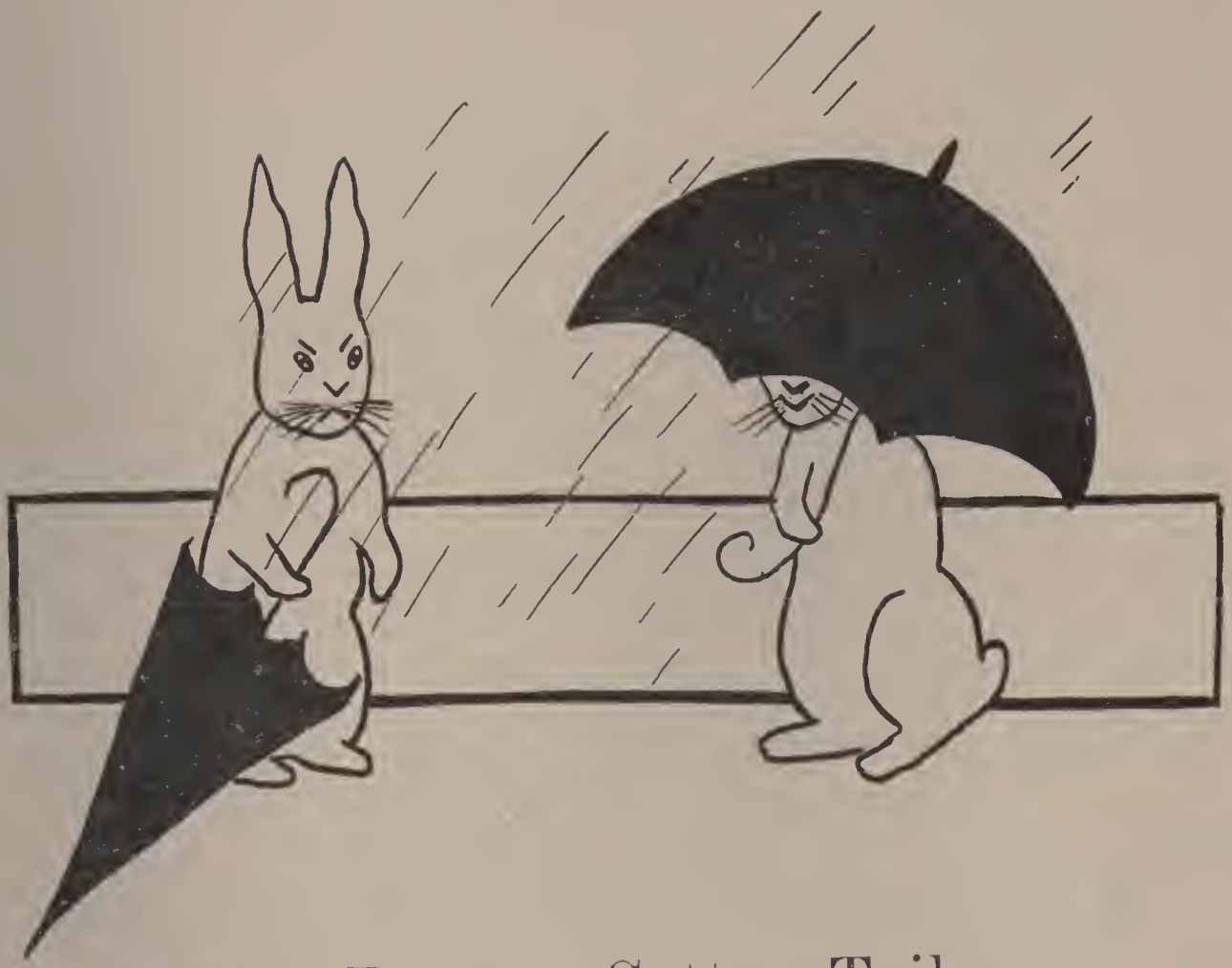
When Susan saw Bunny sitting by the window, she did not stop to go around to the front door, as her mother had trained her to do. She jumped right in through the window, and took a seat on the arm of Bunny's chair.

Have you ever had to stay at home from a pic-nic when all the other children went? And did you have a dear friend who brought you some of the good things to eat? If so, you know just how Bunny felt.

Susan Cotton-Tail had sandwiches in that basket, and cabbage leaves and radishes, and little cookies cut in the shape of a rabbit. (One of the mother rabbits had made these for a joke.)

After a nice visit Susan said she must go home.

Susan wanted to go and pick berries next day. Bunny asked his mother if he might go too, and she said he might, if he would try to be a good little rabbit after this. Bunny promised, and then he went with Susan to the gate.



As Mr. Bunny Cotton-Tail
Went walking down the street,
It was his great good fortune
Susan Cotton-Tail to meet.

Said Susan, "My dear Bunny,
If you would only try
To open wide your parasol,
Your fur would keep quite dry!"

CHAPTER III

The next day, when Bunny Cotton-Tail woke up, he heard the rain pattering against the window panes. He cried so loud, and his tears fell so fast, that his little brother thought the roof was leaking!

Mother Cotton-Tail said it would do no good to cry about the rain, and she went to the closet and brought out a beautiful new silk umbrella. She had bought it for a birthday present for Bunny, but she hated to see Bunny unhappy, so she said he might go out in the rain so as to use it.

Now, Bunny was not a very careful little rabbit, so he did not wait to learn how to open it, but ran out of the house and down the road with the umbrella in his paw. That is the reason you see him so in the picture. He ran fast, because he wanted to show Susan his new present.

Now, wasn't it odd that on that very same morning Susan Cotton-Tail cried when she saw the rain, and that her mother gave her a beautiful new umbrella? But Susan was a careful rabbit, and learned how to open and use the umbrella before she went out.

Susan had left her basket at Bunny's house the night before, so

her mother said she might go after it. That is the way the two rabbits happened to meet.

Bunny was delighted when Susan showed him how to open his umbrella, and they stood there some time, talking in the rain. Of course it was too wet to go for berries, but they wanted to have some fun, so they decided to go to Bunny's house and blow soap bubbles.

On the way home they passed a nice garden. Farmer Jones was out working in it that morning. Bunny wished very much for a bite of cabbage, so he begged Susan to come and hide behind the raspberry bushes, so that they could nibble something while Farmer

Jones was not looking. Now Susan was a good little rabbit, and she knew that to steal is very wrong, so she said, "No."

Then Susan and Bunny went on to Bunny's house, and here they blew soap-bubbles all the morning.

Little Bunny Cotton-Tail
Should not try to roam
In Farmer Jones's cabbage-patch;
He ought to stay at home.

CHAPTER IV

NEXT day, Bunny went over to Susan's house and found Susan's mother crying, and what do you suppose had happened? Why, Susan Cotton-Tail had not come home, and her mother was afraid she might be lost.

When Bunny heard the news, he cried into a little red handkerchief that he had wrapped around his sore paw, and he said he wished to die if Susan Cotton-Tail could not be found!

Now Bunny knew that old Farmer Jones hated the sight of even his little stubby tail, so he thought

the quickest way for him to die would be to run over into the farmer's garden.

He told Susan's mother good-by, waved his sore paw feebly, and set out for the garden. He thought that if he must die he would eat some cabbage first, and he was nibbling away when he heard some one whisper his name very softly.

At first he thought it was Marie, Farmer Jones's little girl, so he curled right up close beside a cabbage, and did not say a word. He peeped around the cabbage, and he could see Farmer Jones's blue shirt, and once in a while he could hear him whistle.

Then he heard a soft little voice

say: "Bunny, Bunny, Bunny." He looked over by the raspberry bushes, and what do you suppose he saw? There was Susan Cotton-Tail, caught in a trap!

When Bunny saw Susan he forgot all about Farmer Jones, and he gave a loud squeal, just the same kind of a squeal he gave when he burned his paw. Farmer Jones came running, and cried: "Ah, ha! I have caught the rabbit at last!"

Bunny had just time to jump into a flower-pot, and Farmer Jones found poor Susan in the trap.

"Now," said Farmer Jones, "I have caught the naughty rabbit that eats my cabbages, and I have a great mind to kill it!"

But he did not kill Susan—oh, my, no—for she just blinked her eyes and smiled at him. She was not the least bit afraid; and why should she have been, when she had never stolen anything from Farmer Jones in her life?

Just then Marie came running out into the garden, and Farmer Jones said:

"See, Marie, I have caught the naughty rabbit that has been eating my cabbages, and she looks as though she had never done anything wrong in her life."

"Oh, the sweet little thing!" cried Marie. "Let me have her for a pet, and I will put a pretty blue ribbon around her neck."

So Marie took Susan up in her little apron and carried her, very gently and carefully, into the house. She made room for the little rabbit in her doll's bed, and there Susan fell asleep.

Little Bunny Cotton-Tail,
Is running home, you see,
And Miss Susan Cotton-Tail
Keeps him company.

CHAPTER V

What did Bunny Cotton-Tail do then, do you suppose? He felt so sorry about Susan that he cried nearly all day, and he was so afraid of Farmer Jones now, that he did not dare to come out of the flower pot! The flower pot had rolled over on one side, so he was quite hidden.

Now it happened that Marie had a nice flower-bed in front of the house, and a friend had given her a new plant to set out. So she began to look for a flower pot to cover it. Of course, you can guess what happened. Marie found Bunny

Cotton-Tail, the flower pot and all! "Oh, papa, here is another bunny! They must be twins," she cried.

Farmer Jones came up, and when he saw how scared poor little Bunny looked, he laughed. He said if they put the two rabbits together, they could soon tell whether they knew each other or not. So Marie carried Bunny into the house.

Susan Cotton-Tail had fallen asleep in the doll's bed, so Marie slipped Bunny in beside her, and he pretended to go to sleep, too. Farmer Jones said this proved that they knew each other; for if they had been strange rabbits, they would have fought.

Night came on, and the big clock

in the hall struck twelve, and Susan woke up. She was so delighted to find Bunny beside her, that she almost screamed for joy, but Bunny put one little soft paw over her mouth, for he was afraid she would waken some one, and he was already planning how they could get away from Farmer Jones's house.

He told Susan that he had heard the cook say she would leave the pantry window open to keep her preserves cool, so, if they could only find the pantry, they might escape.

Susan listened so eagerly that her ears flopped on the side of the doll's bed as though she were keeping time to a tune.

Bunny stole out of bed, and began to search for the pantry. He told Susan to wait until he came back for her.

The moon was not shining, and it was very dark. Bunny felt his way along carefully, till he came to the sitting-room. Here he saw a big black box, beside a window, and it looked to him as though the window were open. Up he jumped on the box, to make sure, and crash! he fell on something that played a tune! The quicker he ran up and down, the louder the tune was, and the louder the tune was, the more scared Bunny was, and the more he ran up and down.

Farmer Jones waked up and could

not think what all the noise meant. He jumped out of bed and ran down stairs two steps at a time, with a candle in his hand. He found Bunny dancing about on the piano keys, and he laughed till he cried.

Then he called the whole family down stairs to see the strange sight. Everybody laughed and petted Bunny, and the more they laughed, the more scared he was, until he saw Susan peeping around a curtain at him.

Then he gave one bound for the open window. Susan followed him, quick as a flash, and whisk! the two frightened little rabbits were racing away down the road

before one of the family could say, "Jack Robinson."

What Farmer Jones and the family thought about it I cannot say, but I can tell you that Susan and Bunny were very careful never to go into his garden again.

Little Bunny Cotton-Tail
Should have gone to school to-day.
He cried so hard he could not see,
And went the other way!

CHAPTER VI

When Susan's mother saw Susan, she laughed and she cried. Then she put Susan to bed, and there the poor little rabbit stayed for a week, and then it was time for school to begin.

When Bunny's mother saw him, she switched him with a little maple switch, and sat him up in the corner until he told the whole story.

Bunny ran away so much, you see, that his mother was quite used to it, while Susan was a good rabbit and had never before run away from home.

The week passed, and then Bunny's

mother said Bunny must go to school. For rabbits have to go to school if they want to learn anything, of course!

So she put up a nice little lunch for Bunny, and gave his coat an extra brush. She brushed him so hard that he cried a little, and went down the road with his dinner pail on his arm, brushing the tears away with his sore paw!

Bunny never did like to go to school very well, so when he stopped crying, and found that he had taken the wrong road and was going into the woods, he was not sorry at all.

He went on a little way and saw some squirrels. They seemed to be

having a very good time, and Bunny sat down to watch them at their play. Then he opened his basket and began to eat his lunch, for he was always hungry.

He was so tired then, after his long tramp, that he fell asleep, and he never opened his eyes until he heard a soft "tinkle, tinkle, tinkle." He opened his eyes, and there stood Susan Cotton-Tail, smiling at him.

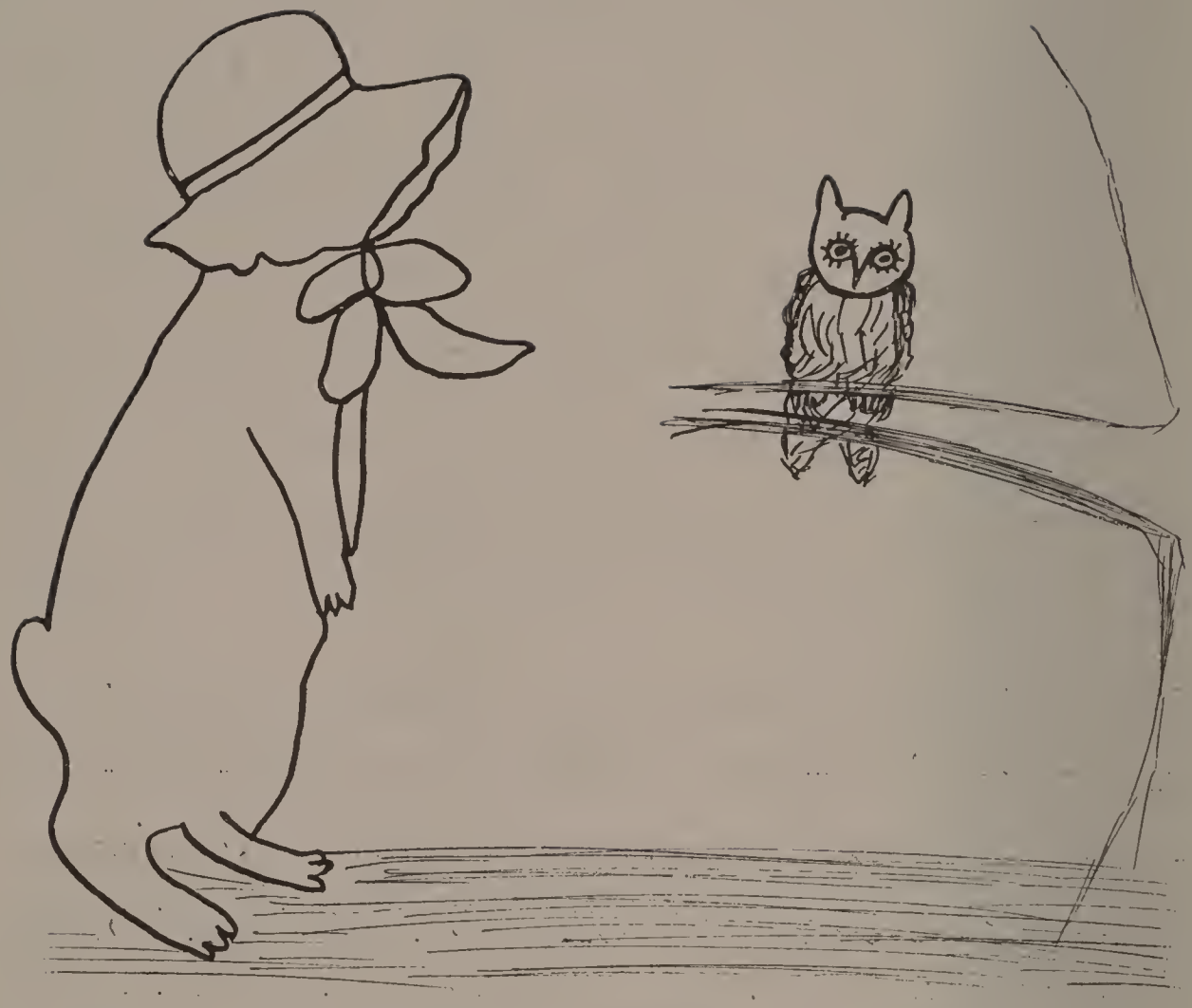
Bunny did not know where he was, at first, but he rubbed his eyes hard, and then he asked Susan where she had got the dear little bell that hung around her neck. Susan said it was a reward given her by her teacher for good behavior. Then Bunny was sorry that he had not

gone to school, for he liked the "tinkle, tinkle" of that bell.

Susan said that all the rabbits were out looking for Bunny, and that they thought him very naughty.

When Bunny got home, he said that he would go to school now every day if Susan might stop for him. It worked well for a week, then that naughty Bunny got up early and went down to watch the little fishes swimming in the brook. All the rabbits went out to look for him and found him and took him home, as before.

That night Mother Cotton-Tail sat by the fire a long time, thinking. Presently, she crept softly out of the house, shutting the door behind her.



Mother Bunny Cotton-Tail
Seeks Mr. Owl, you see,
And little Bunny Cotton-Tail
Is scared as scared can be.

CHAPTER VII

Now, what do you suppose Mother Bunny was going to do? She was going to find Mr. Owl, who is the wisest creature in the woods. And why was she going to find Mr. Owl? Because she wanted to ask him how to stop Bunny Cotton-Tail from running away.

Mr. Owl was at home, as usual, sitting on a branch of an old pine-tree. When Mother Cotton-Tail told her story, he blinked his round eyes and turned his head all the way around to hide a smile. He had heard of Bunny Cotton-Tail before.

Mr. Owl did not talk very much;

wise people never do. So he answered Mother Cotton-Tail with two words: "Mr. Fox."

Mother Cotton-Tail did not see what that meant, but Mr. Owl had no more to say, so she started slowly homeward.

On the way home she passed Mr. Fox's den. There she saw an old overcoat of his out on the line. Then, whisk! jump! as quick as a wink she had that overcoat down from the line, and was off, carrying it over her shoulder.

When she was safely away from Mr. Fox's den, she crept into the coat, though it was much too big, and doubled her ears up neatly inside his cap.

She looked ahead of her, and what did she see, coming down the road, but a little rabbit—a naughty, run-away little rabbit? She knew at once that it was her own Bunny.

Mother Cotton-Tail stood very still in the shadow of a tree, and when Bunny came by, she whisked out, and took him in her arms and started straight for Mr. Fox's den.

Bunny Cotton-Tail was so scared that he did not say a word, but he thought he felt his hair turning gray, and that was a pity for one so young!

When they got near the den, Mother Cotton-Tail stopped. Everything was very still.

"Now, Bunny," she said, "you shall

go in there, and we will eat you up, unless you promise never to run away any more."

Did Bunny promise? Well, indeed he did, in a hurry! And Mother Cotton-Tail told him that all the foxes knew about it and would catch him if he ever ran away again.

Then she gave him a big hug, which scared him nearly to death. Think of his being scared when his own mother hugged him! But you see, he thought she was Mr. Fox. Then she let Bunny go, and he ran straight home.

Mother Cotton-Tail put Mr. Fox's coat back on the line and went home, too, very happy.

Bunny Cotton-Tail never ran away from home any more. So Mr. Owl knew what he was talking about, after all.

Bunny and Susan were always the best of friends, but whether his sore paw ever got well or not, I can not tell you, for I forgot to ask him.

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